

## **Director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture Questions**

1. What is your number one priority as agriculture director? Do you have specific agricultural policy that you want to implement?
2. Describe your role as the agriculture director and your relationship with both the Agriculture Commission and the Governor? Have you spoken with the Governor regarding the two vacancies on the commission?
3. Do you believe the Department of Agriculture gets its fair share of general fund resources? Explain why or why not. Have you expressed your concern over funding with the Governor?
4. What are your thoughts on the proposed fee increases for migrant housing, dairy inspection and maybe even grain inspection? How much should the industry contribute and how much should the state spend to provide necessary regulatory services?
5. What is the biggest hurdle facing the agriculture industry? Do you foresee continued economic upside throughout the industry? Are there any sectors that are hurting right now?
6. Are you aware of the DNRE's recent proposed changes to NPDES permits for CAFOs? Are these changes helpful or harmful for the livestock industry in Michigan?
7. How do you see the relationship between alternative energy and agriculture in Michigan? What opportunities are there for farmers and what are some barriers they face in taking advantage of this growing industry?
8. There are some beginning farmers who are having difficulty obtaining loans and or land to start their farm operations. What should the state do if anything to encourage the growth of small and or beginning farms?
9. Is it wise to continue spending money to fight Chronic Wasting Disease when we are not sure that it's even a problem in the state? Wouldn't that money be better spent elsewhere? How about the money we spend on containing the Emerald Ash Borer? Is that a losing battle?
10. What impact has the Chronic Wasting Disease feeding ban had on farmers?

## **Director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture Questions**

### **1. What is your number one priority as agriculture director? Do you have a specific agricultural policy that you want to implement?**

Food safety will always remain our number one priority as it impacts every Michigan citizen. It is vital that the department fulfill its regulatory role in a fashion that will enable consumers to have full confidence in the safety of our food chain.

Animal and plant health, as well as economic development must also be at the forefront of all discussions. Significant strides have been made in the economic development arena which has resulted in facility expansions, jobs retention, and an increase in domestic and international exports. Our Laboratory also plays an integral role in ensuring consumer confidence with our gasoline inspection duties and weights and measures activities.

Expanding our Rapid Response initiative to address food and animal health emergencies is one area I would like to focus on this coming year. In addition, maximizing our cooperative effort with FDA, including funding for audit work and other activities associated with food safety, will be integral to our success.

### **2. Describe your role as the agriculture director and your relationship with both the Agriculture Commission and the Governor? Have you spoken with the Governor regarding the two vacancies on the commission?**

As Ag Director, my role is to ensure that Michigan agriculture continues to be a viable industry for years to come. I work closely with the Agriculture Commission to implement sound agriculture policy and guidance which benefits not only the agriculture industry in this state, but also our natural resources and the environment. The Governor and/or her staff is briefed on issues of pertinent concern, i.e. high profile food recalls, new ag economic developments (Gerber, Kellogg, MMPA, etc), as well as contentious media issues.

The two Commission vacancies were filled on February 9, 2010. Prior to that, I made contact with the Governor's Appointment Office only to inquiry about the timeframe in which the positions would be filled. No contact or recommendation was made to the Governor on this issue, as it is not my role to pre-select Ag Commission members, or any other vacancy for that matter.

### **3. Do you believe the Department of Agriculture gets its fair share of general fund resources? Explain why or why not. Have you expressed your concern over funding with the Governor?**

Over the past several years, the Department has struggled with acquiring adequate general fund resources. At a time when agriculture is one of Michigan's few bright spots in our economy, our resources have decreased to substantial lows. Programs and staff have been cut to bare bone in order to meet the state's budget reduction plan. We simply cannot afford to jeopardize Michigan agriculture.

The Governor's staff, State Budget Office, and our Legislature have been briefed on the significant impacts these reductions will have on MDA.

**4. What are your thoughts on the proposed fee increases for migrant housing, dairy inspection and maybe even grain inspection? How much should the industry contribute and how much should the state spend to provide necessary regulatory services?**

Without the proposed fee for migrant labor housing program, MDA will no longer be able to provide any migrant labor housing inspections. On average, MDA conducts over 1,000 inspections at 850 housing locations including 4,000 living units used by more than 22,000 migrant farm workers and their families across the state.

The proposed dairy fees will help maintain the program at 2010 levels. MDA inspects 2,299 dairy farms and 75 processing plants. Michigan's dairy industry has a \$5.9 billion impact on the state's economy.

Stakeholders should, to a degree, participate in financing these programs; but the big question is to what extent is the burden placed on them? MDA continues to meet with the industry to identify fair and equitable resources to keep these programs viable. The state's general fund also has some responsibility to ensure food safety and other consumer protection programs are maintained at healthy levels.

**5. What is the biggest hurdle facing the agriculture industry? Do you foresee continued economic upside throughout the industry? Are there any sectors that are hurting right now?**

Our biggest hurdle is maintaining a good climate conducive to agriculture prosperity and development in Michigan. The limited general fund dollars to do our job effectively is of utmost concern.

We've been fortunate to see an increase in export activity over the past few years, and will continue to develop our relationships with foreign countries that are in need of our diverse crops.

Another upswing is agriculture's ability to balance the wise use of our natural resources with demanding environmental regulations. Significant strides have been made in this area, particularly with the Right to Farm and Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Programs (MAEAP).

The dairy industry has seen an economic decline due to the downturn in milk prices. Some fruit crops (apple and cherry) have also experienced issues; however, it's a result of too good a crop. Overall, I am extremely optimistic about the future of agriculture. Another decade of economic growth is on the horizon.

**6. Are you aware of the DNRE's recent proposed changes to NPDES permits for CAFOs? Are these changes helpful or harmful for the livestock industry in Michigan?**

I am very much aware of the CAFO/NPDES issue. MDA staff interacts routinely with DNRE to develop a common ground suitable for all parties. While we sometimes encounter stumbling blocks, progress continues to be made. Both agencies want to balance environmental protection with economic development opportunities.

**7. How do you see the relationship between alternative energy and agriculture in Michigan? What opportunities are there for farmers and what are some barriers they face in taking advantage of this growing industry?**

The relationship has changed to a degree with the transfer of energy-related responsibilities to DELEG. Ethanol, biofuels, and anaerobic digesters are very significant parts of agriculture. I see a bright future in alternative energy in Michigan agriculture.

**8. There are some beginning farmers who are having difficulty obtaining loans and or land to start their farm operations. What should the state do if anything to encourage the growth of small and or beginning farms?**

The president of Greenstone Farm Credit Service recently prepared a presentation to the Agriculture Commission on this very issue. The entire banking industry is sensitive to all forms of lending; not just agriculture. They have tightened up nationwide. MDA continues to work with Greenstone, credit unions, and other lenders to identify problems areas and provide guidance to our industry.

**9. Is it wise to continue spending money to fight Chronic Wasting Disease when we are not sure that it's even a problem in the state? Wouldn't that money be better spent elsewhere? How about the money we spend on containing the Emerald Ash Borer? Is that a losing battle?**

Chronic Wasting Disease is a very significant disease that must be monitored closely. Every state has encountered costs associated with this disease, as well as bovine tuberculosis, pseudorabies and other animal diseases. The money is expended wisely; only what's essential for proper surveillance and enforcement.

The Emerald Ash Borer is a very difficult disease we've battled for several years. While the pest has not been eradicated, our trapping and surveillance efforts have resulted in slowing the growth and helping with mitigation efforts for property owners.

**10. What impact has the Chronic Wasting Disease feeding ban had on farmers?**

The baiting ban has affected some farmers as certain commodities were being produced and supplied for this activity.



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Donald Koivisto

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2/18/10

Date